



ELNEC

End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium

Core Curriculum

Symptom Management
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Essential Elements of Symptom Management

- Ongoing assessment and evaluation
- Requires interdisciplinary teamwork
- Reimbursement concerns (affordable options)
- Research is needed

Coyne, 2007; Coyne et al., 2002

Symptoms and Suffering

- Symptoms create suffering and distress
- Psychosocial intervention is key to complement pharmacologic strategies
- Need for interdisciplinary care

Common Symptoms

- **Respiratory**
 - Dyspnea, cough
- **GI**
 - Anorexia, constipation, diarrhea, nausea/vomiting
- **General/Systemic**
 - Fatigue/weakness
- **Psychological**
 - Depression, anxiety, delirium/agitation/confusion

Dyspnea

- **Distressing shortness of breath**
- **Associated diseases**

Dudgeon, 2010

Causes of Dyspnea

- Major pulmonary causes
- Major cardiac causes
- Major neuromuscular causes
- Other causes

Assessment of Dyspnea

- Use subjective report
- Clinical assessment
 - Physical exam
 - Diagnostic tests

Dudgeon, 2010

Treatment of Dyspnea

- Treating symptoms or underlying cause
- Pharmacologic treatments
 - Opioids
 - Bronchodilators
 - Diuretics
 - Other

Clemens & Klaschik, 2007;
Dudgeon, 2010; Jacobs, 2003

Treatment of Dyspnea

- **Nonpharmacologic**
 - Oxygen
 - Counseling
 - Pursed lip breathing
 - Energy conservation
 - Fans, elevation
 - Other

Dudgeon, 2010

Cough

- **Common symptom in advanced disease**
- **Causes pain, fatigue, insomnia**

Dudgeon, 2010;
Estfan & LeGrand, 2004

Causes of Cough

- **Assess underlying cause (e.g. infection, sinusitis, reflux)**
- **Assess type of cough**
- **Assess associated symptoms**
- **Diagnostic tests may be needed**

Dudgeon, 2010

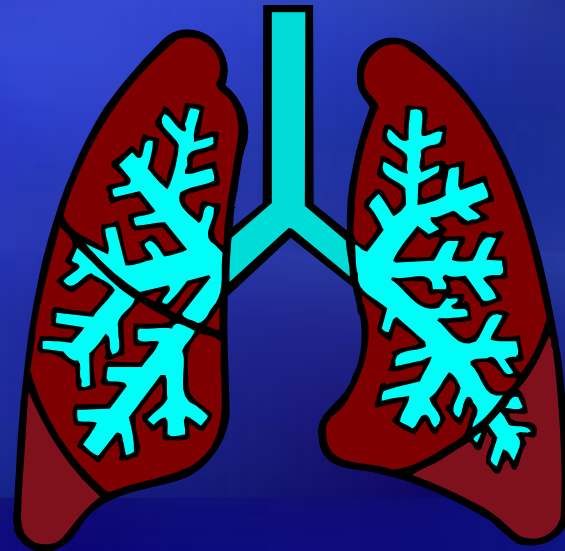
Pharmacologic Interventions for Cough

- **Suppressants/expectorants**
- **Antibiotics**
- **Steroids**
- **Anticholinergics**

Lingerfelt et al., 2007

Non-Pharmacologic Interventions for Cough

- Chest PT
- Humidifier
- Positioning



Constipation

- Infrequent passage of stool
- Frequent symptom in palliative care
- Prevention is key

Causes of Constipation

- Disease related (e.g. obstruction, hypercalcemia, neurologic, inactivity)
- Treatment related (e.g. opioids, other meds)

Assessment of Constipation

- **Bowel history**
- **Abdominal assessment**
- **Rectal assessment**
- **Medication review**

Economou, 2010

Treatment of Constipation

- Medications
- Dietary/fluids
- Other approaches

Berger et al., 2007; Economou, 2010

Diarrhea

- Frequent passage of loose, nonformed stool
- Effects (e.g. fatigue, caregiver burden, skin breakdown)

Causes of Diarrhea

- Disease related
- Malabsorption
- Concurrent diseases
- Psychological
- Treatment related

Assessment of Diarrhea

- **Bowel history**
- **Medication review**
- **Infectious processes**

Treatment of Diarrhea

- Treat underlying cause
- Dietary modifications
- Hydration
- Pharmacologic agents

Nausea and Vomiting

- Common in advanced disease
- Assessment of etiology is important
- Acute, anticipatory or delayed

Mannix, 2010

Causes of Nausea and Vomiting

- Physiological (GI, metabolic, CNS)
- Psychological
- Disease related
- Treatment related
- Other

Assessment of Nausea and Vomiting

- Physical exam
- History
- Lab values



Pharmacologic Treatment of Nausea and Vomiting

- Anticholinergics
- Antihistamines
- Steroids
- Prokinetic agents
- Other

Non-Drug Treatment of Nausea and Vomiting

- Distraction/relaxation
- Dietary
- Small/slow feeding
- Invasive therapies

Fatigue

- **Subjective, multidimensional experience of exhaustion**
- **Commonly associated with many diseases**
- **Impacts all dimensions of QOL**

Anderson et al., 2010;
Ferrell et al., 1996

Causes of Fatigue

- Disease related
- Psychological
- Treatment related



Assessment of Fatigue

- Subjective
- Objective
- Laboratory data

Treatment of Fatigue

- Pharmacologic
- Nonpharmacologic (rest, energy conservation, involve PT/OT)

Anderson et al., 2010

Depression

- Ranges from sadness to suicidal
- Often unrecognized and undertreated
- Occurs in 25-77% of terminally ill
- Distinguish normal vs. abnormal
- Should not be dismissed

Pasacreata et al., 2010

Causes of Depression

- Disease related
- Psychological
- Medication related
- Treatment related



Assessment of Depression

- Situational factors/symptoms
- Previous psychiatric history
- Other factors (e.g. lack of support system, pain)

Pasacreta et al., 2010

Example Questions for Depression Assessment

- How have your spirits been lately?
- What do you see in your future?
- What is the biggest problem you are facing?

Pasacrete et al., 2010

Pharmacologic Interventions for Depression

- Antidepressants
- Stimulants
- Non-benzodiazepines
- Steroids

Non-Pharmacologic Interventions for Depression

- Promote autonomy
- Grief counseling
- Draw on strengths
- Use cognitive strategies

Anxiety

- Subjective feeling of apprehension
- Often without specific cause
- Categories of mild, moderate, severe

Causes of Anxiety

- Medications and substances
- Uncertainty

Pasacreata et al., 2010

Assessment of Anxiety

- Physical symptoms
- Cognitive symptoms
- Questions for assessment

APA, 1994

Pharmacologic Interventions for Anxiety

- Antidepressants
- Benzodiazepines/anticonvulsants
- Neuroleptics
- Non-benzodiazepines

Non-pharmacologic Interventions for Anxiety

- Empathetic listening
- Assurance and support
- Concrete information/warning
- Relaxation/imagery

Key Nursing Roles

- Patient advocacy
- Assessment
- Pharmacologic treatments
- Non-pharmacologic treatments
- Patient/family teaching

Conclusion

- Multiple symptoms common
- Coordination of care with physicians and others
- Use drug and nondrug treatment
- Patient/family teaching and support



A Nurse's Touch